

## EDITORIAL / OPINION

## Smoking war heating up

Another salvo in the on-going battle between non-smokers and smokers has been fired and this shot has hit close to home.

The Chapel Hill Town Council voted on Oct. 14 to severely curtail smoking in public places.

The council passed the measure unanimously, with some of the more vocal council members asking for an all-out, total ban on smoking in public.

This ordinance, branded as one of the toughest in the nation, bans smoking in public restrooms, in service lines, at the voting booths, at the Chapel Hill Town Hall, on a bus, in a taxi, in a common area of an apartment complex, in seating areas of large auditoriums, and in theaters, just to name a few places.

Ordinances such as this deeply infringe upon the ability of smokers to light up whenever, wherever, they want. Ostensibly, they are being passed to protect the "rights" of non-smokers.

As a nation founded and based on individual freedoms, it is difficult to understand how such ordinances that place one group's "rights" above another group's "rights" can be passed.

On the one hand, no one can argue that non-smokers have the right to breath air that is free of tobacco smoke.

But smokers also have the right to smoke. Where do we draw the line? Whose "rights" are wrong and whose "rights" are right?

Whose "rights" take precedence and is it logical or feasible, to give one member of society a "right" to breath tobacco-free air while another member is denied the "right" to exercise a personal freedom to smoke?

Both sides in this on-going battle have legitimate arguments in their defense of individual freedoms.

But at this point, there doesn't seem to be any attempt to compromise on either side.

The momentum, at this point, is clearly on the side of the non-smokers, who greatly outnumber smokers in this country.

For North Carolina farmers, who produce the majority of the nation's tobacco, the outcome of these on-going battles is crucial.

Tobacco is our state's primary agricultural crop. In some agricultural communities, it is the lifeblood of that community.

To have tobacco removed as a viable crop in these rural areas would produce a true agricultural depression for some communities, yet if the non-smoker/smoker war continues, the threat is very real that tobacco could become a "soo-crop."

Unfortunately, the rural communities of North Carolina could end up as the real ca-

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